

FLORIDA FANTASY FESTIVAL



**JUNE 4 and 5, 1988
SHERATON TAMPA EAST**

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Bill Mummy, Mark A. Nelson, Mart Nodell

Guest of Honor: WILL EISNER

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Ms. TREE

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200
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plus!

JOHNNY DYNAMITE

Renegade
Press

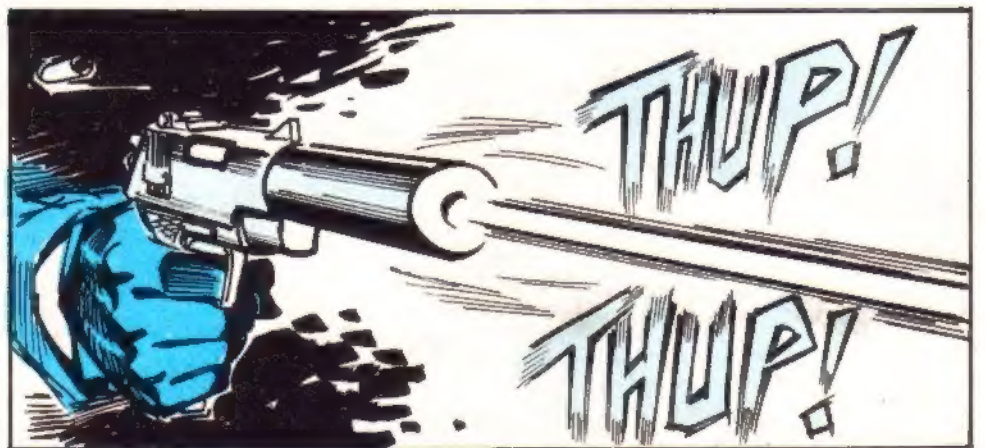
"MURDER CRUISE"

A MIST-TREE TALE

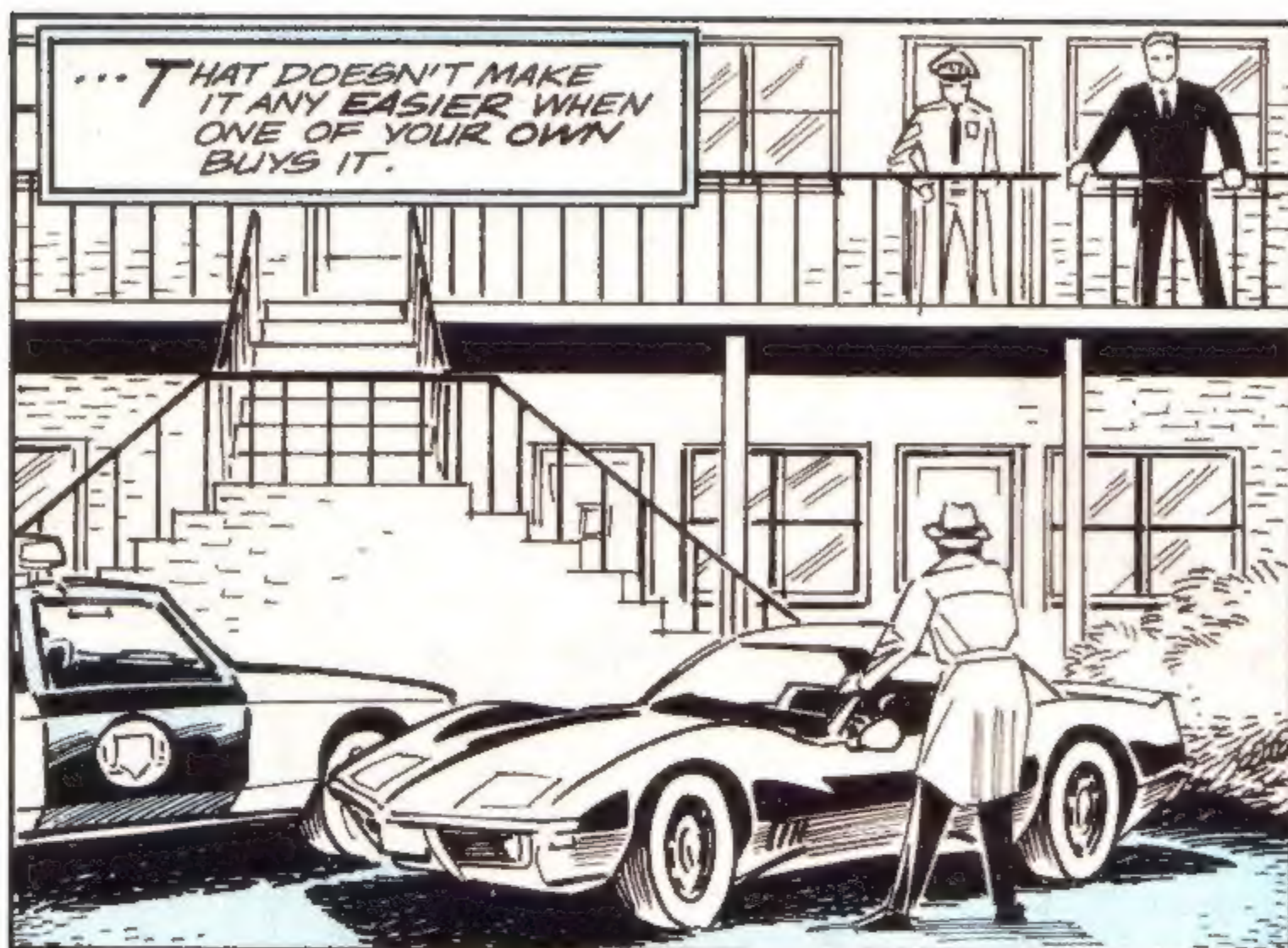
BY MAX COLLINS, TERRY BEATTY AND GARY KATO

prologue:

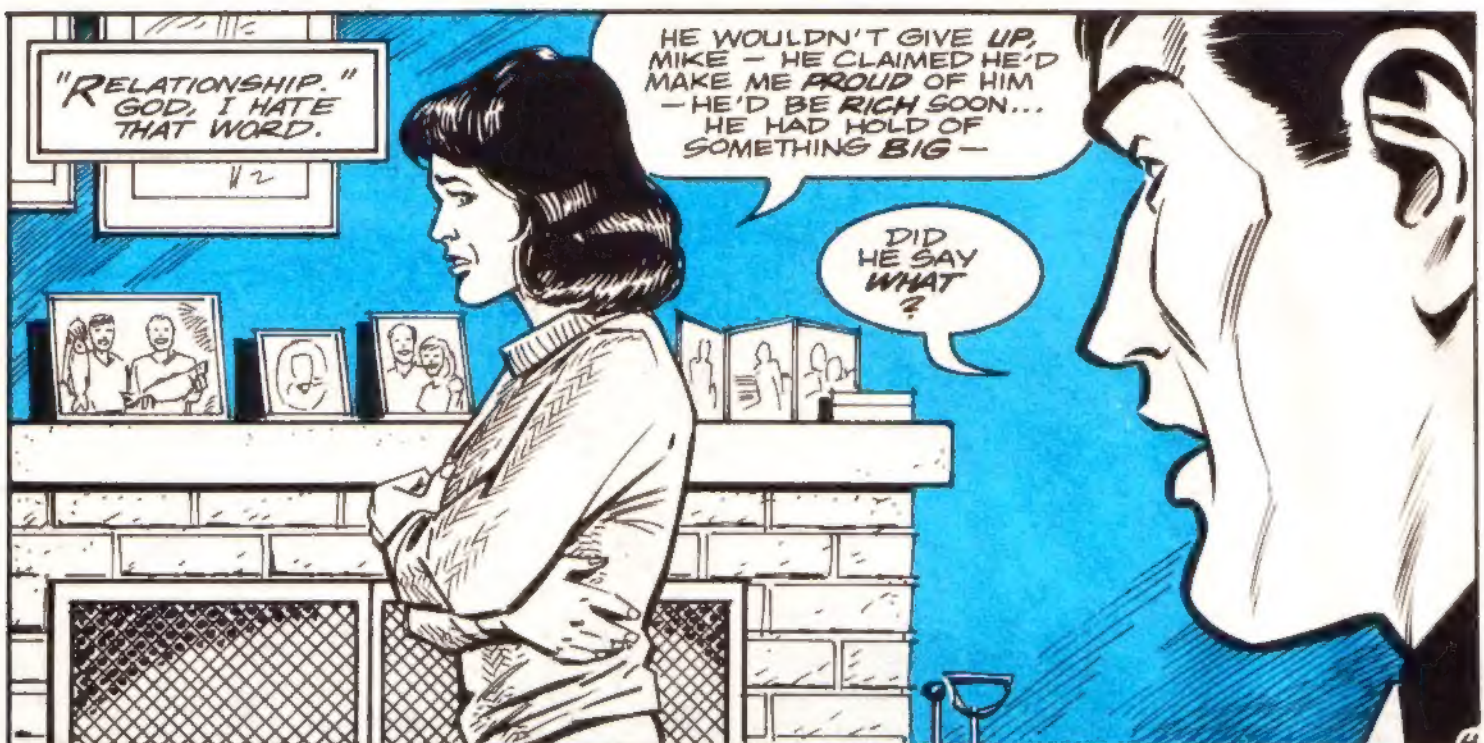
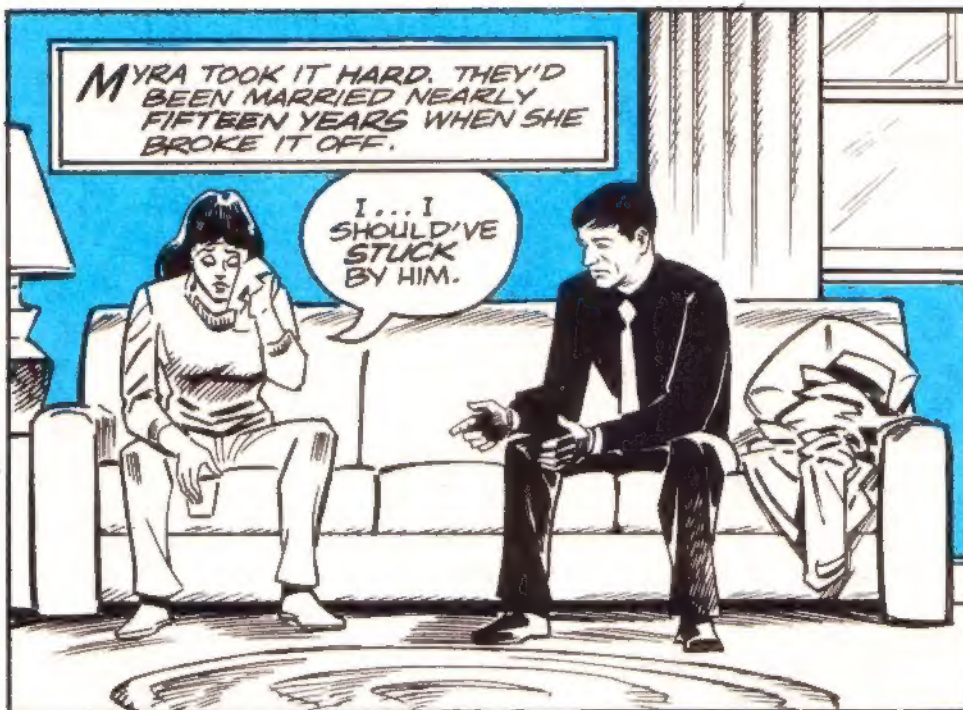
GRAVE RESERVATIONS



JUST BECAUSE YOU'VE
BEEN A COP - JUST
BECAUSE YOU'RE A
DETECTIVE WHO'S SEEN
IT ALL ... 11-YEAR-OLD
JUNKIES, 12-YEAR-OLD
PROSTITUTES, 13-YEAR-
OLD HITMEN...



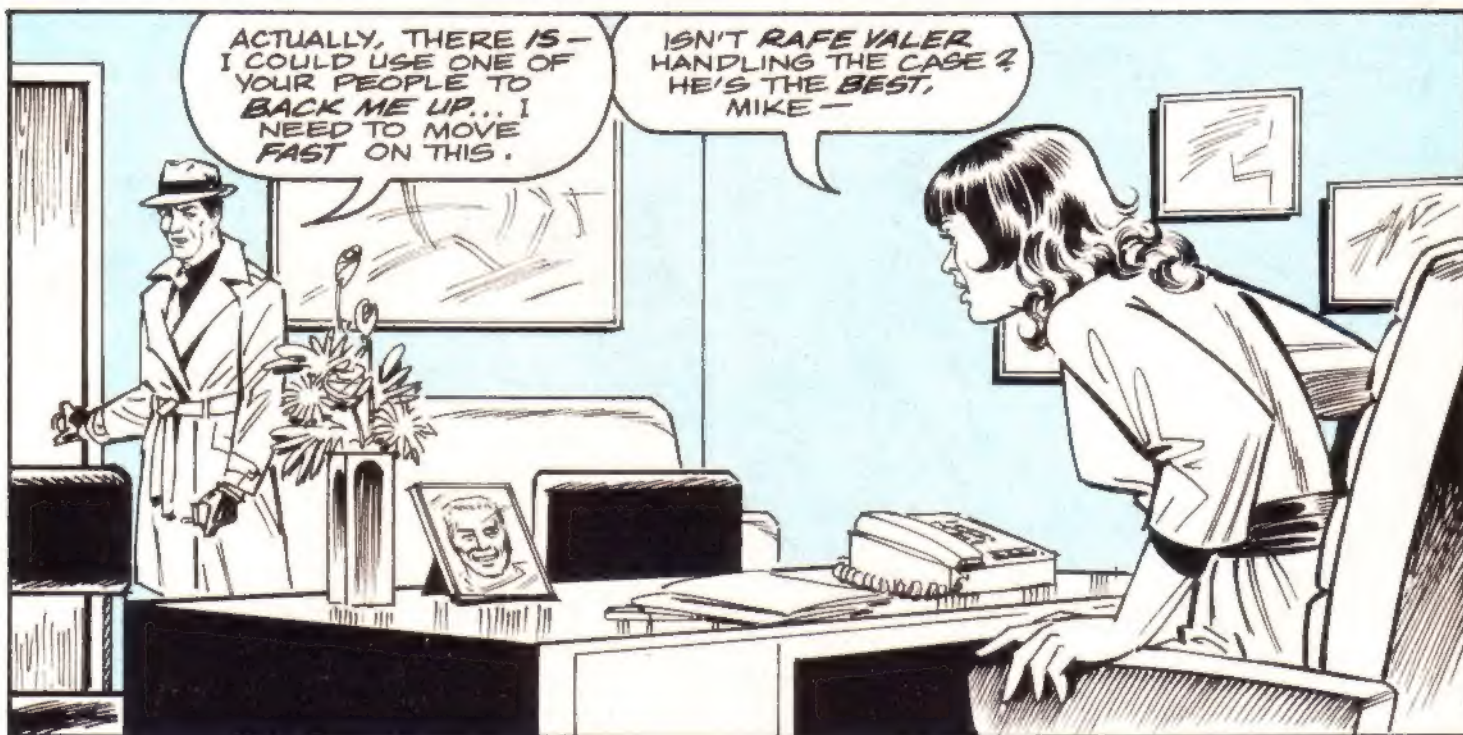




BUT OF COURSE HE HADN'T. DAMN — I'D BARELY BEGUN LOOKING INTO THIS, AND ALREADY I'D HIT A DEAD END. I NEEDED HELP ON THIS ONE.



MIKE — I HEARD ABOUT YOUR FRIEND JACKSON. IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO?



ACTUALLY, THERE IS — I COULD USE ONE OF YOUR PEOPLE TO BACK ME UP... I NEED TO MOVE FAST ON THIS.

ISN'T RAFE VALER HANDLING THE CASE? HE'S THE BEST, MIKE —

NO — YOU'RE THE BEST... THEN COMES ME. VALER'S GOOD. ALL RIGHT... ONLY THIS IS PERSONAL. YOU, OF ALL PEOPLE, SHOULD UNDERSTAND THAT.



LOOK, I'LL TRADE MY OWN TIME, LATER ON, FOR DAN GREEN OR ROGER FREEMONT'S NOW —

MIKE, I'LL BE HAPPY TO OBLIGE, BUT...





WILL'S OFFICE WASN'T MUCH LIKE THAT OF TREE INVESTIGATIONS, INC. — BUT MAYBE I'D FIND MORE HELP THERE, ANYWAY —



CONTINUED IN THIS ISSUE —

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NEON MIRAGE

A Novel by

MAX ALLAN COLLINS

ON SALE NOW



MEET THE CHICAGO WILD MAN

JAN.
D
Y
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K

DYNAMITE

**MEET
JOHNNY
DYNAMITE**

**THE ONE-EYED
PRIVATE EYE!**

**HE'S ROUGH!
HE'S TOUGH!
HE'S DYNAMITE!**

10c



JOHNNY DYNAMITE

THE BABE'S VOICE OVER THE PHONE HAD TERROR IN IT. SHE WANTED ME TO MEET HER...



...AND NAMED A FLORIST SHOP ON NORTH STATE STREET.



SHE WAS ALONE, BUT I COULDN'T HAVE MISSED HER IN A CROWD.

OH, MR. DYNAMITE!

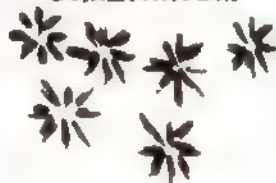


IT WAS THE LOOK OF TERROR IN HER EYES THAT MADE ME BUY HER ACT... UNTIL I REALIZED THERE WAS A MOVEMENT BEHIND A GROUP OF POTTED PALMS. THEN IT WAS TOO LATE! I WAS A PERFECT SETUP FOR...

THE PHONY KILL!



MY GUTS WERE BURNING, AND IT FELT AS IF THE SLUG HAD GONE RIGHT THROUGH ME AND BUSTED MY SPINE IN TWO. THEN A SAP CAME SMASHING DOWN ON MY SKULL. NO TIME FOR THINKING, BUT EVEN A FADING CONSCIOUSNESS CAN THINK OF SOMETHING...



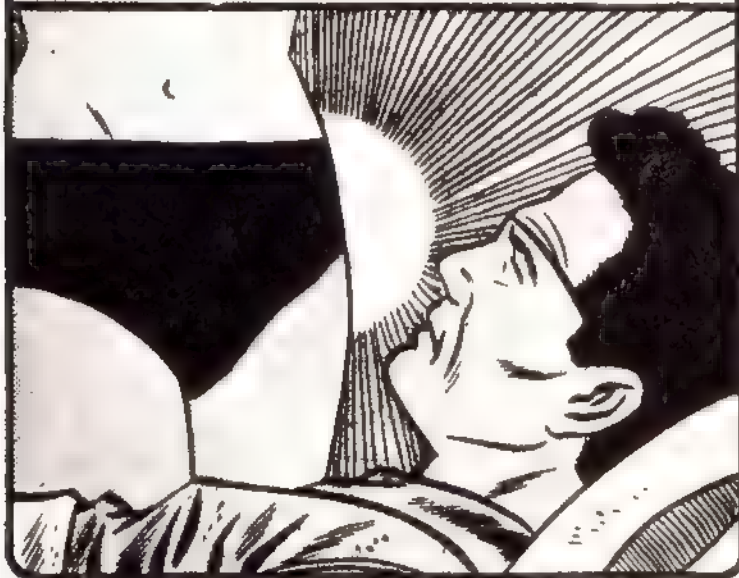
I'VE BEEN BLASTED FOR KEEPS. SO WHY THE SAP?
...UNNNNUH...



I CAME GRADUALLY OUT OF A DULL ACHING FOG TO SEE A WHITE SHIRT WITH A HEAD STICKING OUT OF IT WAVERING BEFORE ME...



THEN SOMETHING SHUT OFF THE SHIRT WITH THE HEAD STICKING OUT OF IT AND I COULD SEEM TO MAKE NOTHING OUT OF WHAT I SAW BUT THE BOTTOM SIDE OF A CALIFORNIA ORANGE.



IT WAS TOO MUCH FOR ME, SO I CLOSED MY EYES, ...WHEN I OPENED THEM AT LAST, THE SHIRT WITH THE HEAD LOOKED LIKE A DOCTOR, AND HE WAS SAYING TO SOMEONE...

HE'LL BE ALL RIGHT IN A FEW DAYS, MR. MCFARLANE. JUST LET HIM REST.



THE DOC PASSED AWAY, AND THE CALIFORNIA ORANGE CAME TOWARD ME... THEN CHANGED INTO A VISION IN A BIKINI...

I'M SORRY, JOHNNY, IT WAS ALL FOR YOUR OWN GOOD!



THE VISION TOOK ON A PAIR OF HORNS, WHEN I HEARD HER VOICE: A SHE-DEVIL THAT HAD RUN ME INTO A GAT AND A BLACKJACK...

YOU #!#@#!!!

OHhh...





YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO BE BURNED JOHNNY. BUT BELIEVE ME, THIS FRAME WAS FOR YOUR OWN GOOD. IT WAS A TOUGH FRAME SURE, BUT I NEED YOUR SERVICES. I'M DAVID MCFARLANE. NAME MEAN ANYTHING?

SURE. YOU OWN THE BIG LAKE SHIPPING LINE. BUT WHAT'S THE PITCH ABOUT MY SERVICES? I'M NOT SO HARD TO GET THAT YOU HAVE TO PUT THE BLAST ON ME.



THOSE ARE POWDER BURNS, JOHNNY. MY MAN USED A BLANK. WE'RE A BIG OUTFIT.. AND REALISTIC. DO YOU KNOW HARRY GANZ?

I OUGHT TO. HE TRIED TO SHAKE DOWN A CLIENT OF MINE. I BLEW HIS MOB WIDE OPEN. BUT I MISSED GANZ... HE TOOK IT ON THE LAM WHY?



OUR CONTACTS TOLD US HE HIRED THREE KILLERS FROM NEW YORK TO... SHALL WE SAY BUMP YOU OFF? BUT WE BEAT THEM TO IT. LEAH MY SECRETARY, WILL EXPLAIN. YOU'LL STAY AT HER APARTMENT UNTIL YOU RECOVER.

GANZ IS A CUTE GUY. BUT THIS TIME HE'S MESSING WITH THE WRONG BOY.

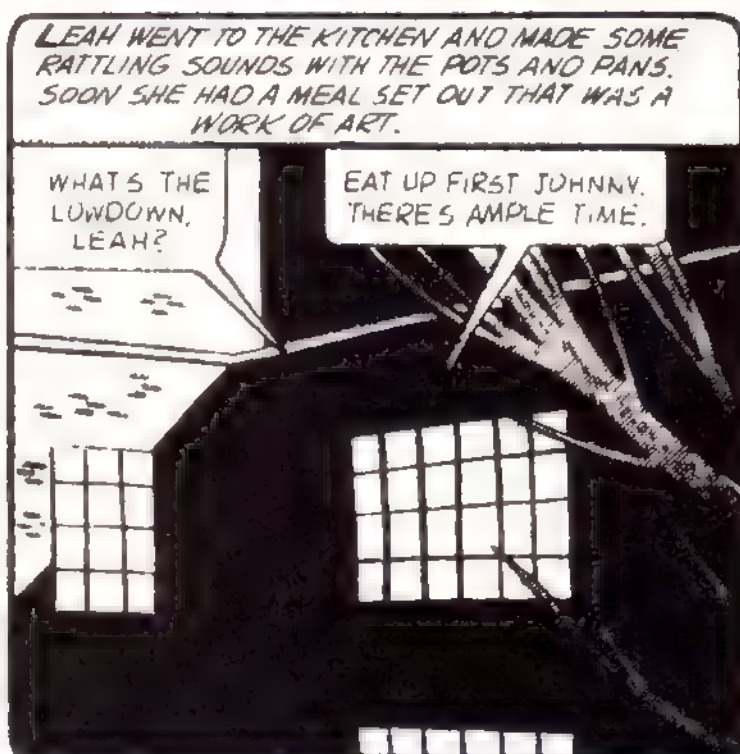


LEAH'S APARTMENT HAD NO RESORT FACILITIES LIKE MCFARLANES, BUT IT WAS QUITE A PLACE FOR A SECRETARY, UNLESS SHE HAPPENED TO BE A **VERY CONFIDENTIAL ONE!!** THE CHANGE FROM THE BIKINI DIDN'T CHANGE HER TOO MUCH...

I'M SORRY FOR THE FRAME, JOHNNY. CAN I DO ANYTHING TO MAKE IT UP TO YOU?



I DIDN'T WASTE TIME WITH FANCY WORDS. I LOOKED AT THE LUSCIOUSLY CARVED FIGURE BEFORE ME, AND AT THE RIPE, RED LIPS THAT SEEMED TO SAY KISS ME JOHNNY.. KISS ME!



LEAH WENT TO THE KITCHEN AND MADE SOME RATTLING SOUNDS WITH THE POTS AND PANS. SOON SHE HAD A MEAL SET OUT THAT WAS A WORK OF ART.

WHAT'S THE LOWDOWN, LEAH?

EAT UP FIRST JOHNNY. THERE'S AMPLE TIME.

I USED TO BE HARRY GANZ'S GIRL, JOHNNY, THEN I FOUND OUT WHAT HE WAS LIKE AND I LEFT HIM. DAVE MCFARLANE GAVE ME A JOB THEN. HARRY'S HAD IT IN FOR DAVE EVER SINCE. BEFORE HE DISAPPEARED, HIS MOB SANK TWO OF DAVE'S BOATS. DAVE IS OUT TO GET GANZ AND WANTS YOU TO FIND HIM.



I'VE MY OWN SCORE TO SETTLE WITH GANZ. I'LL TAKE THE JOB.

DAVE SAID YOU WOULD, AND WHEN HE LEARNED WHAT HARRY HAD IN STORE FOR YOU, HE SAW A WAY TO GET YOU ON GANZ'S TRAIL AND THE NEW YORK KILLERS OUT OF OUR TOWN AT THE SAME TIME.



LEAH SAID THE FLORIST WAS WORKING WITH DAVE AND DIDN'T REPORT MY BEING SAPPED TO THE COPS. HE ONLY SAID THAT I HAD BEEN BUMPED AND MY BODY STOLEN. WHEN SHE HAD LEFT FOR MCFARLANE'S, I DIALED THE OFFICE. IT WAS TWO A.M. I'D HAD QUITE A MORNING!



OH, JOHNNY, JOHNNY! THE PAPERS... (SOB)...



NO TIME TO EXPLAIN, HONEY. GET ME ALL THE DOPE YOU CAN ON DAVID MCFARLANE, HONEY. I'LL BUZZ BACK.

I HAD NOT BOUGHT MCFARLANE'S BILL OF GOODS COMPLETELY. THAT'S WHY I'D ASKED JUDY TO CHECK ON HIM. THEN I WENT OUT AND FOUND A STAIRWAY TO THE ROOF.



NOR DID I BELIEVE MCFARLANE WOULD LEAVE ME FREE IN LEAH'S APARTMENT WITHOUT PLANTING A TAIL OUTSIDE THE BUILDING, TO SEE WHETHER OR NOT I WAS GOING TO LAM OUT OF THE JOB. BUT I DOUBTED HE'D PLANTED ONE ON THE ROOF...



I WALKED ACROSS THE TOPS OF SEVERAL ROOFS THEN FOUND THE FIRE ESCAPE. IT TOOK ME DOWN INTO AN ALLEY.



I HOPPED A CAB DOWN TO MCFARLANE'S WHERE...

FOR ALL I KNOW MCFARLANE HIMSELF COULD BE TIED UP WITH GANZ, AND TRYING TO FEED ME TO HIM.



THERE WAS A BABE AT THE SWITCHBOARD THAT I WOULD ALSO HAVE LIKED TO SEE IN A BIKINI. MCFARLANE HAD A GOOD SENSE OF DESIGN, I THOUGHT. SHE LOOKED UP...

CAN I DO SOMETHING FOR YOU?

ONLY ONE THING AT PRESENT, BABY. TELL RUDY HACKETT THAT I'M HERE... THAT HARRY GANZ SENT ME!

RUDY HACKETT



IT WAS A LONG GAMBLE, I HAD NEVER HEARD OF RUDOLPH HACKETT UNTIL I HAD READ HIS NAME ON THE DOOR. BUT HE SENT FOR ME RIGHT AWAY...

I TOLD HARRY **NEVER** TO SHOW UP HERE. **NEVER...** OR TO HAVE ANY OF HIS MEN SHOW UP! NOW GET OUT, MISTER... I'LL TALK TO HARRY LATER.



I DIDN'T EXPECT TO HIT PAY DIRT SO SOON. I WENT OUT AND DOWNSTAIRS I FOUND A PHONE BOOTH AND CALLED JUDY...

WHAT ABOUT MCFARLANE, HONEY. YOU DIG UP ANY DOPE ON HIM?

HE'S CLEAN, JOHNNY DARLING. THERE'S NOT A THING AGAINST HIM, EXCEPT THAT HE'S BIG BUSINESS... AND THAT HE LIKES BEAUTIFUL GIRLS.



I HAD JUST STEPPED OUT OF THE BOOTH, WHEN...

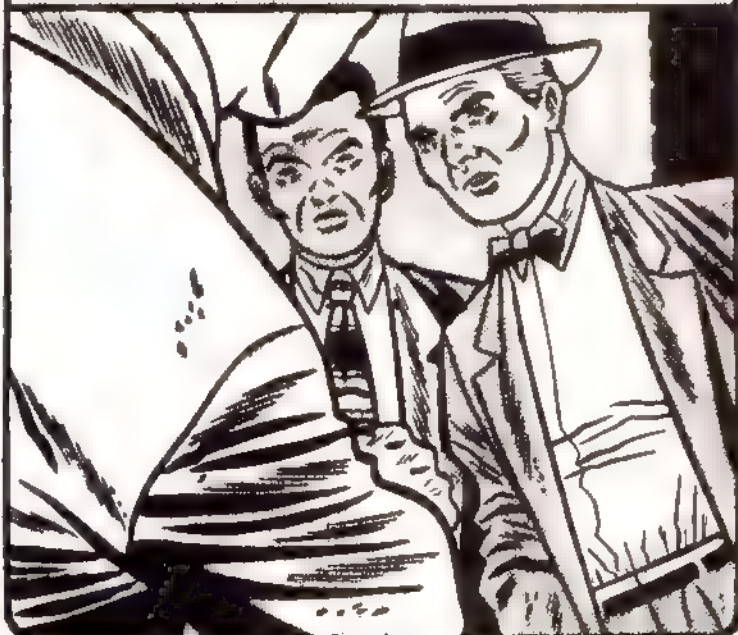
DON'T MAKE ANY PASSES, BUD. JUST WALK ALONG AS IF NOTHING WAS WRONG...OR PLENTY WILL BE!



YOU WOULDN'T HAVE BELIEVED THEY'D TRY IT IN BROAD DAYLIGHT. BUT I GAVE THE MUSCLE BOY A WALLOP THAT MADE HIS TEETH CRUNCH IN HIS MOUTH.



I SWUNG AROUND IN TIME TO SEE RUDY HACKETT AND ANOTHER HOOD COME AT ME FROM BEHIND.



I WAS HOLDING MY OWN, FOR AWHILE, BUT I MADE THE MISTAKE OF LOSING SIGHT OF HACKETT, AND...

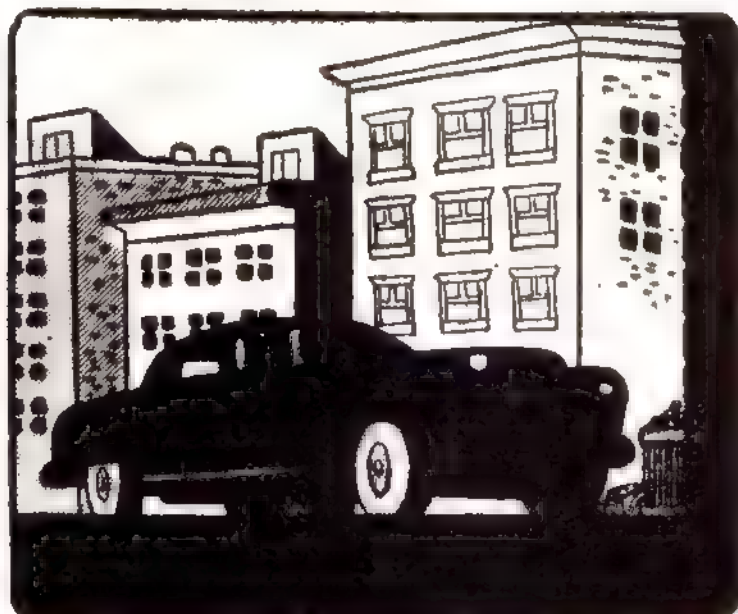


WE'RE IN THE CLEAR. BETTER TAKE HIM RIGHT TO THE BOSS!

YOU BETTER COME TOO, RUDY. AND TELL HARRY ALL ABOUT IT.



I CAME TO IN THE CAR, BUT I DIDN'T LET THEM KNOW IT. WHEREVER WE WERE WHEN THE CAR STOPPED IT STANK OF GARBAGE IN THE HEAT OF THE AFTERNOON...



BUT I WASN'T LONG IN FINDING OUT WHAT KIND OF COMPANY I WAS IN...

THIS IS GOOD! IT'S THE SHAMUS, DYNAMITE! MAKE HIM TALK. MAKE HIM SAY WHO TURNED HIM LOOSE ON RUDY!

HOW'S THAT, HARRY?



I MANAGED TO KEEP SOME SEMBLANCE OF SENSE IN MY HEAD UNTIL...

LEAVE HIM. LET'S GO OUT FOR A DRINK. HE'LL TALK WHEN WE GET BACK! THEN I GOT A LITTLE SCORE TO SETTLE WITH THE LOUSY #!!!#!!



I DON'T BELIEVE THERE WAS A CONNECTED THOUGHT LEFT IN ME WHEN THEY WENT OUT OF THE ROOM. BUT AS I LAY ON THE FLOOR, SOMETHING CAUGHT MY EYE... SOMETHING THAT STARTED MY ACHING HEAD POUNDING LIKE A SLEDGE HAMMER.



THEY HADN'T FRISKED ME CAREFULLY ENOUGH. THEY HAD FORGOTTEN TO LOOK FOR THE LITTLE GUN I CARRY IN MY GARTER HOLSTER...

THEY'RE COMING BACK! I HEAR THEM.



I WAS WAITING FOR THEM. THEY BARGED IN LIKE A HERD OF CATTLE...

ALL RIGHT, SHAMUS...NOW YOU'RE GONNA TALK! YOU... **WHA?**



YEAH! I'LL DO ALL THE TALKING!!



THEY WERE STUNNED FOR JUST LONG ENOUGH. I DIDN'T HAVE ANY SORE GUT OR MUSCLE FOR A FEW MINUTES...



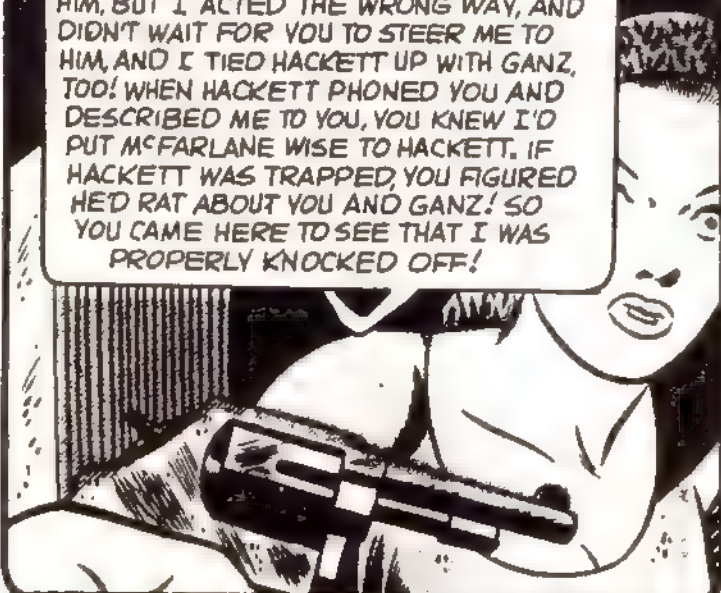
THERE WAS QUITE A PILE OF CORPSES, BUT THERE WAS ONE THING I HADN'T ATTENDED TO. I GAVE MY ATTENTION TO THE PIECE OF CLOTH STICKING OUT OF A CLOSET DOOR. I CHECKED GANZ'S ROD, DREW OUT THE CLIP AND RELOADED IT WITH A SINGLE BULLET. THEN I WENT TO THE CLOSET AND JERKED THE DOOR OPEN.



YOU SHOULD HAVE WORN THE BIKINI, LEAH. THE WHOLE THING FELL TOGETHER WHEN I SAW YOUR DRESS STICKING OUT OF THE CLOSET DOOR. YOU NEVER LEFT GANZ AT ALL. YOU AND RUDY HACKETT KEPT GANZ WISE TO ALL MCFARLANE DID. BUT MCFARLANE BEGAN TO LOOK LIKE A SOFT TOUCH FOR YOU, AND YOU THOUGHT IT WOULD BE NICE TO HAVE MCFARLANE KNOCK GANZ OFF!



BUT WHEN GANZ HID OUT, YOU COULDN'T TELL MCFARLANE **YOU** KNEW WHERE HE WAS, SO YOU THOUGHT OF HAVING **ME** LOCATE HIM, BUT I ACTED THE WRONG WAY, AND DIDN'T WAIT FOR YOU TO STEER ME TO HIM, AND I TIED HACKETT UP WITH GANZ, TOO! WHEN HACKETT PHONED YOU AND DESCRIBED ME TO YOU, YOU KNEW I'D PUT MCFARLANE WISE TO HACKETT. IF HACKETT WAS TRAPPED, YOU FIGURED HE'D RAT ABOUT YOU AND GANZ! SO YOU CAME HERE TO SEE THAT I WAS PROPERLY KNOCKED OFF!



SHE STARTED TO BLUBBER AND I LET HER HAVE IT! JEEZ, I WAS SORE!

THAT'S FOR THE TROUBLE YOU CAUSED ME, BABY!

EEEEEE!!
JOHNNY!



IT'S ONLY A POWDER BURN, LEAH. I BLANKED THAT SLUG. MCFARLANE MAY WANT TO MAKE IT GOOD, HOWEVER, WHEN I TELL HIM ABOUT IT. SO LONG, LEAH. YOU WERE NICE TO KNOW.



THE END.



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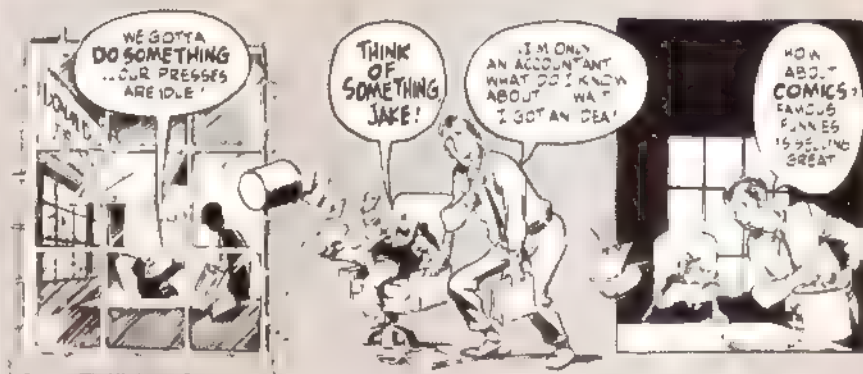
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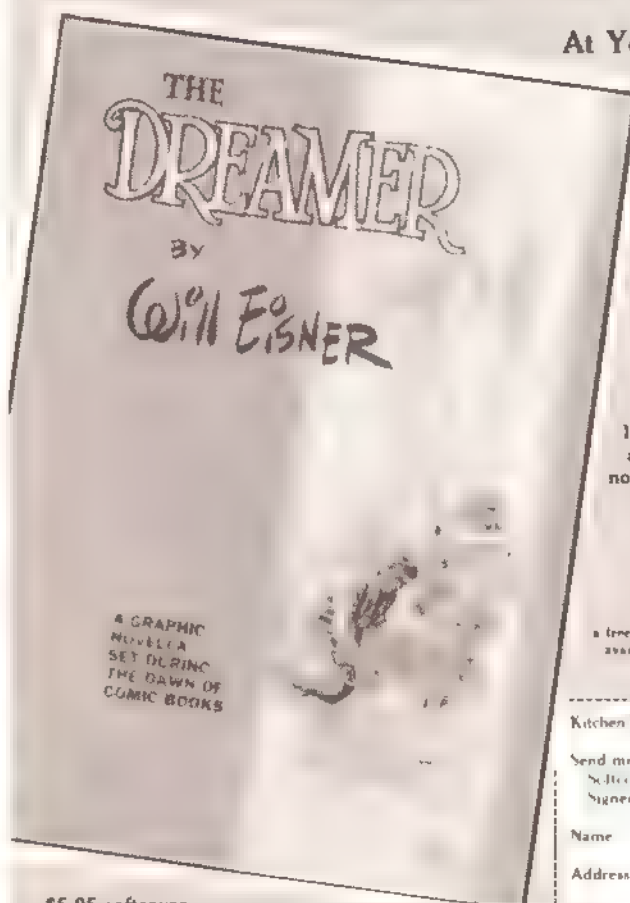
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"MURDER CRUISE"

A MIST-TREE TALE

BY MAX COLLINS, TERRY BEATTY AND GARY KATO

GOLDEN VOYAGE

PIER ONE IN OLD
SAN JUAN,
SATURDAY.

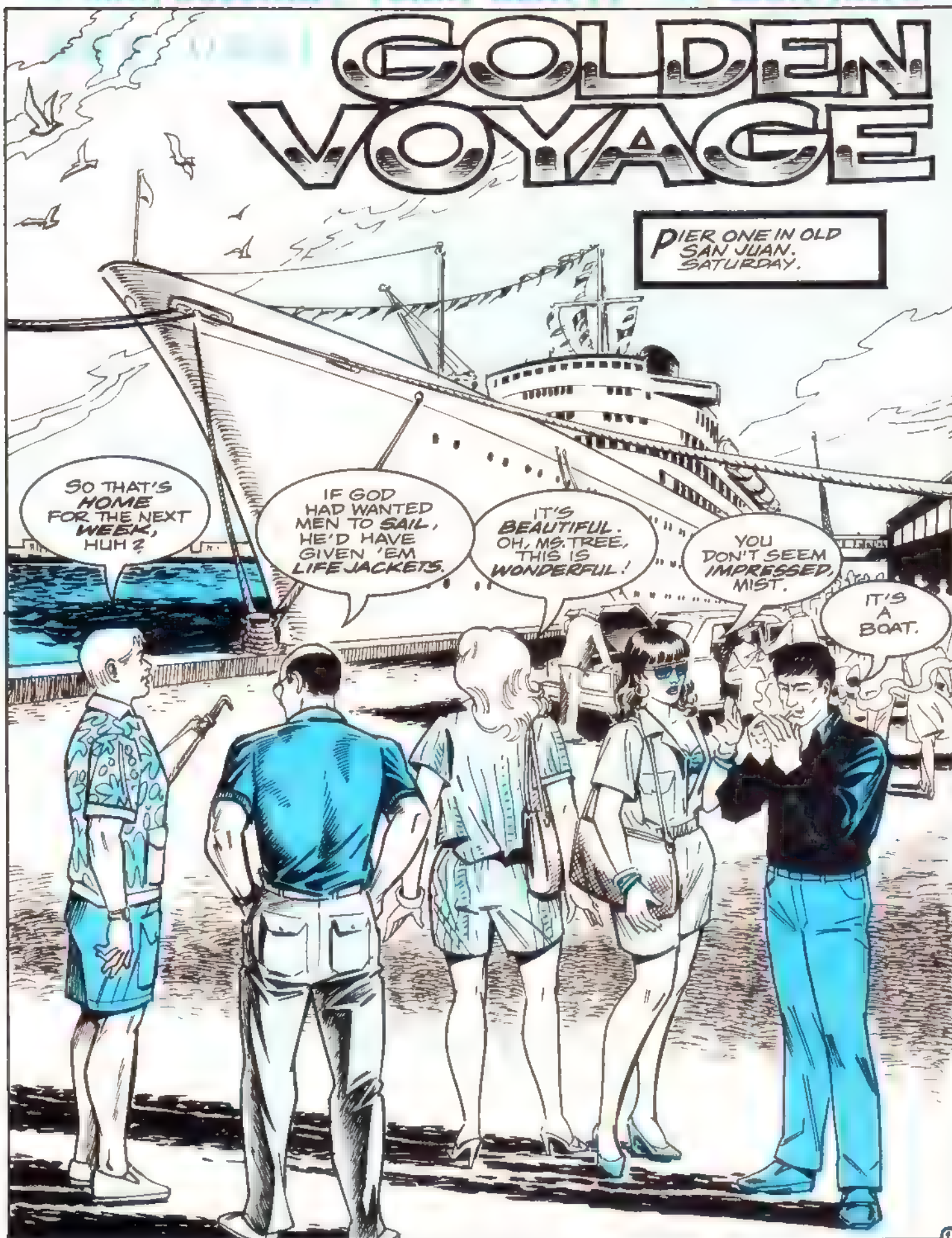
SO THAT'S
HOME
FOR THE NEXT
WEEK,
HUH?

IF GOD
HAD WANTED
MEN TO SAIL,
HE'D HAVE
GIVEN 'EM
LIFE JACKETS.

IT'S
BEAUTIFUL.
OH, MS. TREE,
THIS IS
WONDERFUL!

YOU
DON'T SEEM
IMPRESSED,
MIST.

IT'S
A
BOAT.



I WAS WORRIED ABOUT MIST. HE WAS DEPRESSED OVER HIS FRIEND JACKSON'S MURDER, MAYBE THIS TRIP WOULD BE GOOD FOR HIM. BUT WHY HAD HE DECIDED TO ACCEPT MY INVITATION AT THE LAST MINUTE?

I THINK WE HAVE TO GO OVER THERE AND GET OUR **PASSPORTS** CHECKED—

DUTY FREE PORT. WANNA PICK UP SOME **BOOZE**?

HEY— IT'S **EARLY** YET, ROGER. TAKE IT EASY.



SOON WE WERE BOARDING THE SHIP— THE SHIP'S PHOTOGRAPHER SNAPPING EACH OF US AS WE DID...



AND THEN THE SHIP'S CAPTAIN AND HIS OFFICERS WERE GREETING EVERYONE— THIS WAS, AFTER ALL, THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY CRUISE FOR THE CIRCUS LINE—





AH - SO YOU'RE MS. TREE - THE WELL-KNOWN AMERICAN DETECTIVE.

CAPTAIN ABEL - PLEASURE TO MEET YOU, SIR. I FEEL LUCKY TO BE ABOARD SUCH A SPECIAL CRUISE...



PLEASE ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE YOU TO TWO MEMBERS OF THE CIRCUS LINE'S FIRST FAMILY... THEY'RE HELPING CELEBRATE OUR SILVER ANNIVERSARY -



MS. TREE, MEET DAVID AND JULIE CARRUTHERS -

IT'S AN HONOR TO HAVE YOU ABOARD, MS. TREE - YOU'RE A FAVORITE IN THE LONDON PRESS -

WE'VE READ ALL ABOUT YOU -

A GOOD DEAL OF IT'S TRUE, UNFORTUNATELY. I TAKE IT YOU'RE THE CARRUTHERS' WHO OWN THE CIRCUS LINE?



ACTUALLY, AUNT BERYL IS THE PRINCIPLE STOCKHOLDER... SHE COULDN'T BE HERE -

SHE'S ILL, I'M AFRAID - IT'S A GREAT DISAPPOINTMENT TO HER TO MISS THIS SPECIAL VOYAGE -

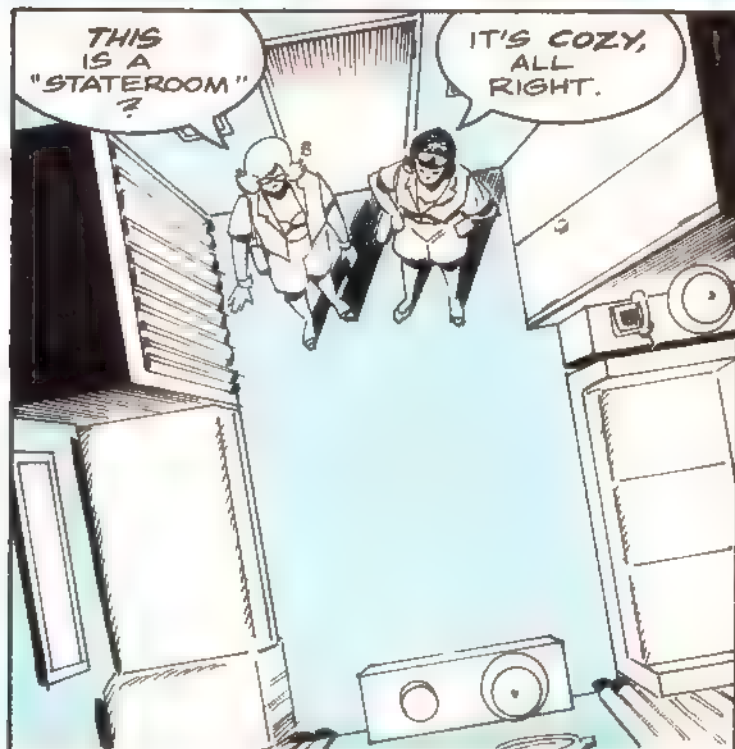
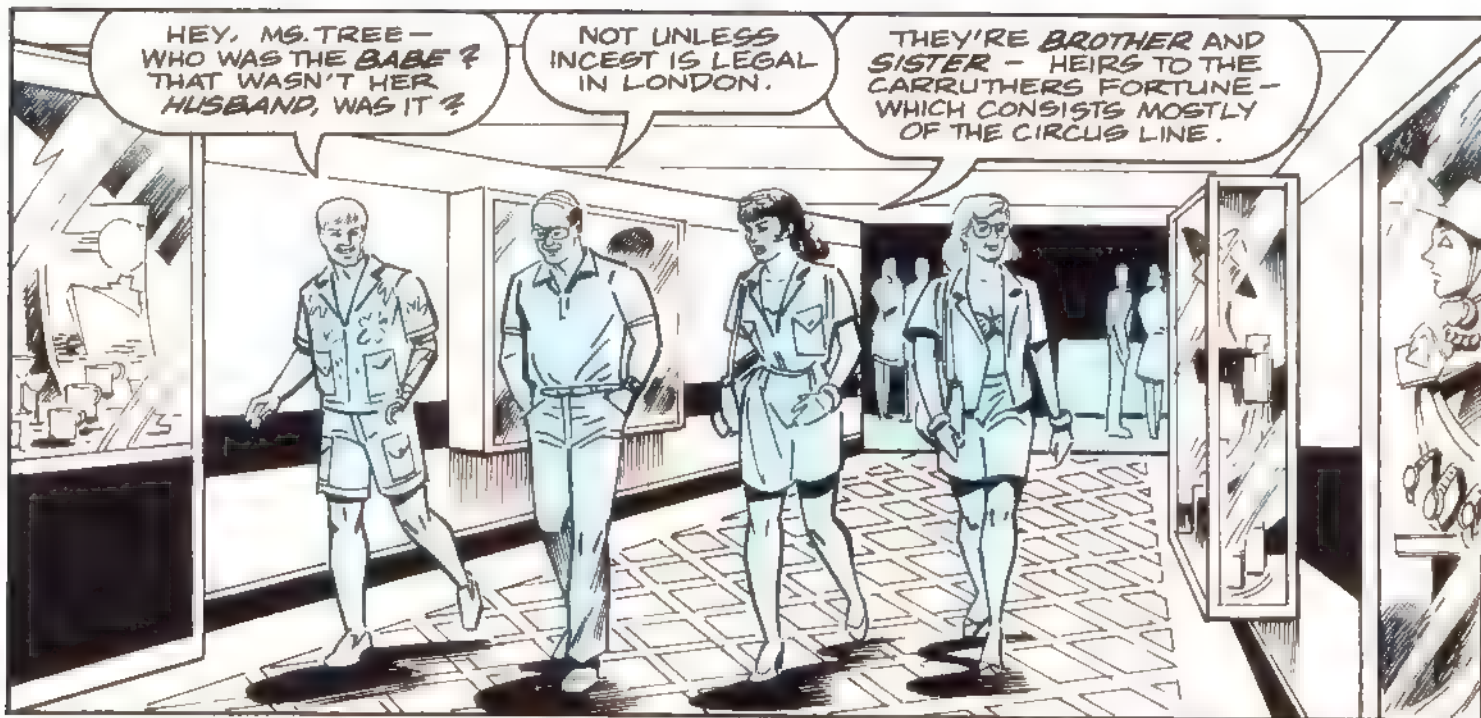


THE CAPTAIN TELLS ME THIS IS A WORKING VACATION FOR YOU AND YOUR STAFF.

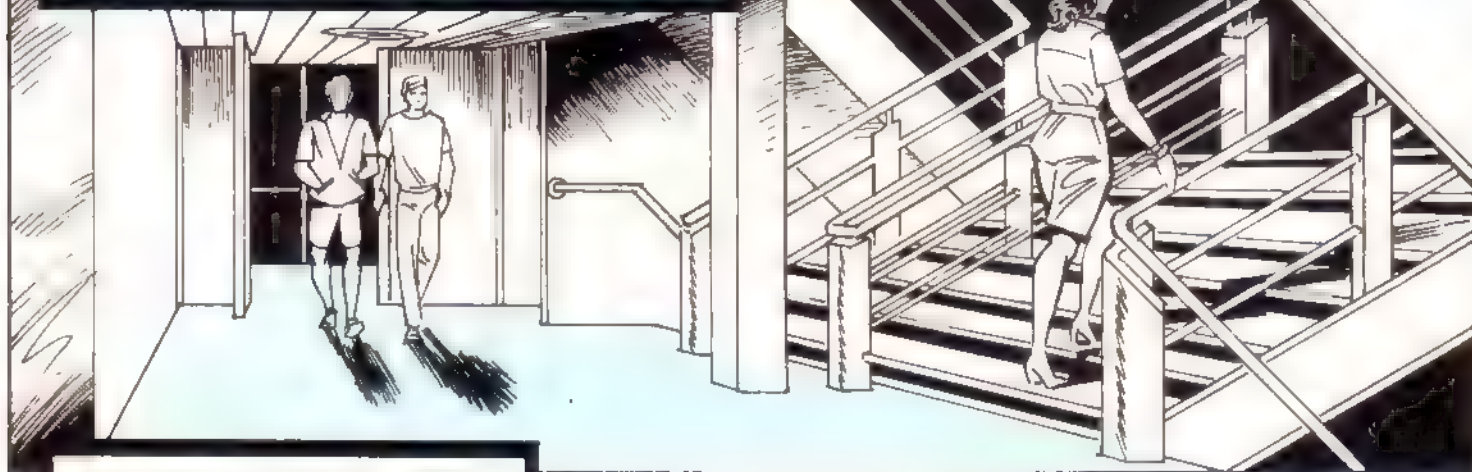
IT'S A WORK RETREAT - MOSTLY R & R.

ARE YOU A DETECTIVE, TOO?

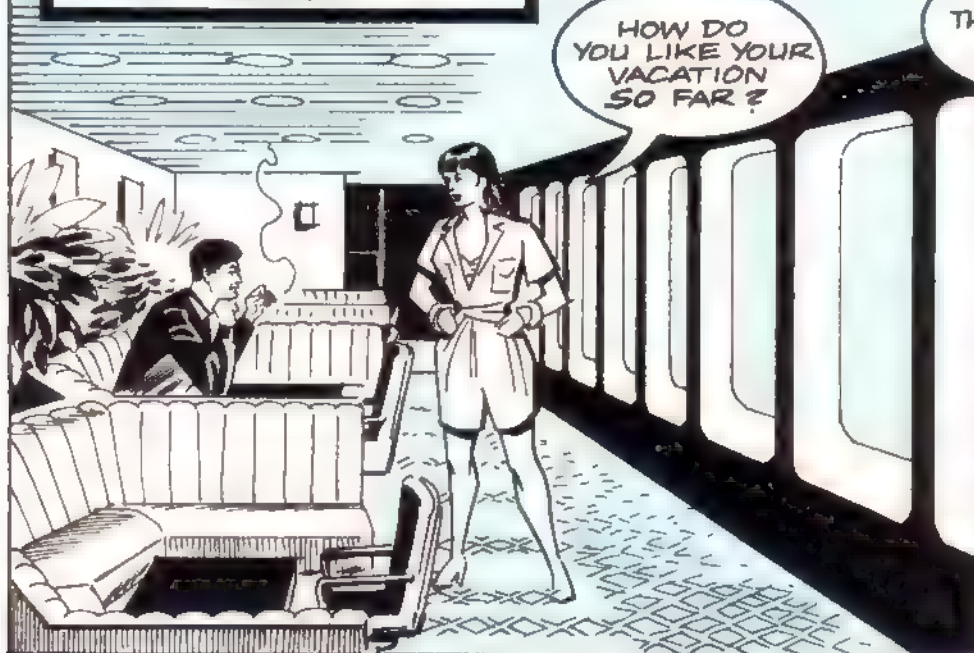
HMM HMMM.



I DECIDED TO HAVE A LITTLE TOUR OF THE CAROUSEL BEFORE THE FIRST OF MANY MEALS - IT WAS MORE CLAUSTROPHOBIC THAN I HAD IMAGINED. UNLIKE MY LOVE BOAT EXPECTATIONS... LIKE BEING ON A BIG AIRPLANE -



IN THE LOUNGE ON FIVE DECK, I STUMBLED UPON MIST, BROODING INTO SPACE -



HOW DO YOU LIKE YOUR VACATION SO FAR?

SWELL. THANKS FOR THE INVITE.



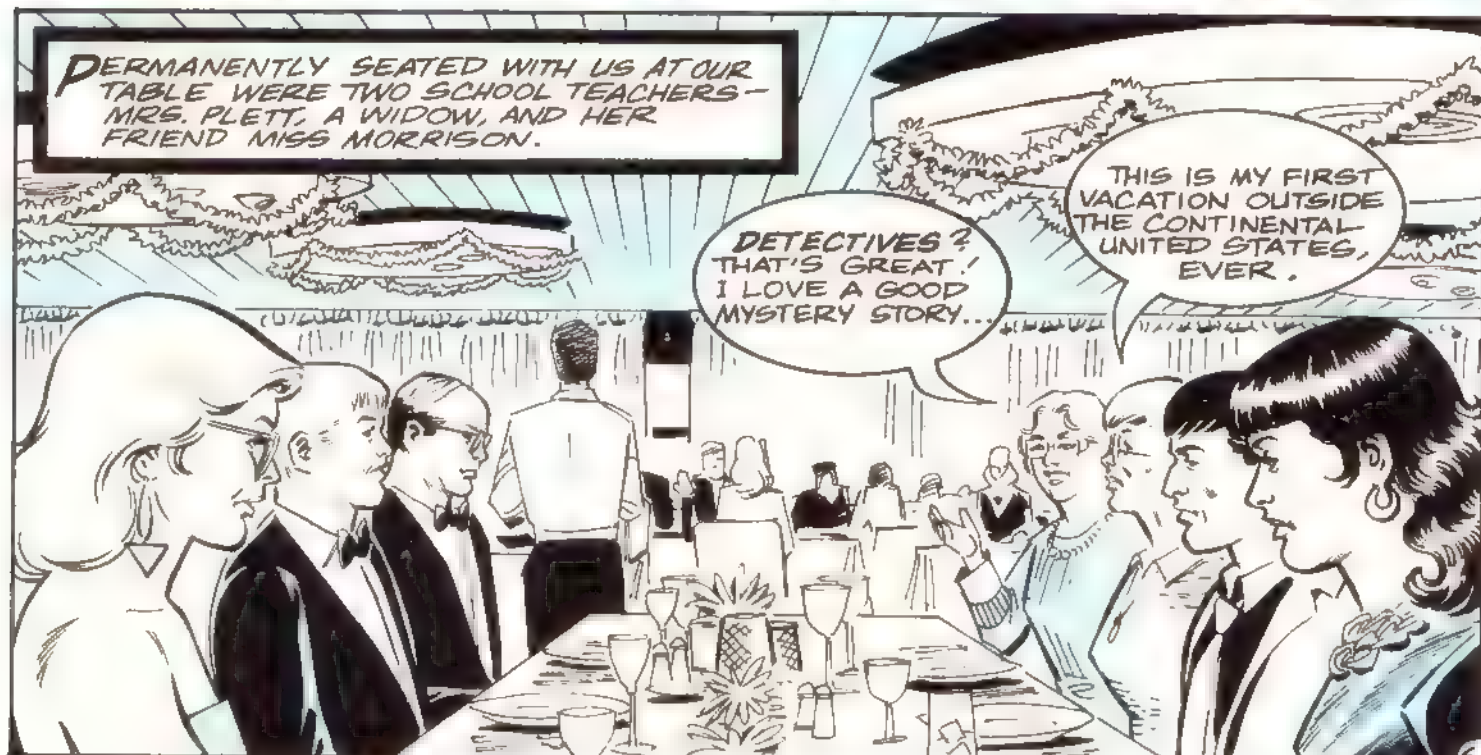
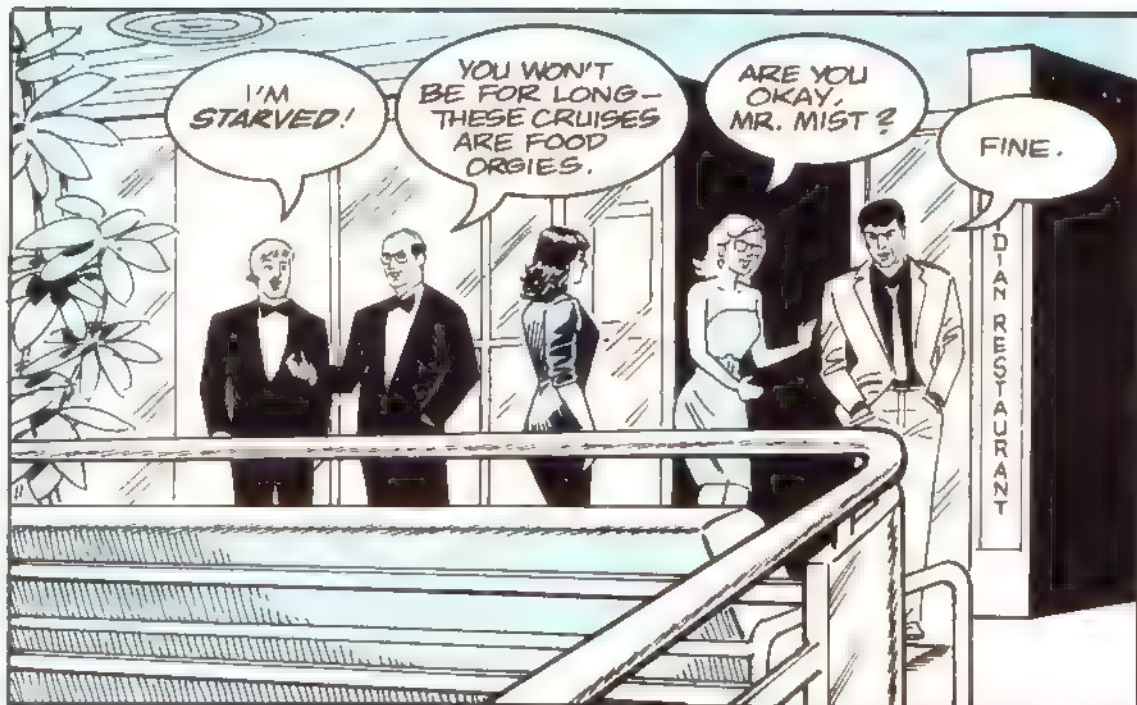
COME ON, MIKE - 'FESS UP... WHY'D YOU COME ALONG? WHY AREN'T YOU INVESTIGATING YOUR FRIEND'S MURDER?



WHO SAYS I'M NOT?



BUT THAT WAS ALL MIST WOULD OFFER ON THE SUBJECT, AND SOON I WAS "QUEUING UP" (THE SHIP'S REGISTRY WAS BRITISH, AFTER ALL) FOR SUPPER. THE CAROUSEL HAD TWO SEATINGS FOR ALL MEALS, AND OUR LITTLE GROUP HAD BEEN ASSIGNED THE LATER OF THE TWO...



MRS. PLETT, IT SEEMED,
HAD WON THE TRIP FOR
TWO —

I'VE NEVER WON ANYTHING
IN MY LIFE, KID. BUT I'VE
ALWAYS TRAVELLED A LOT...



... AND I WAS ELIGIBLE
FOR THE CONTEST THROUGH
MY LOCAL TRAVEL AGENCY.
25th ANNIVERSARY OF THE
CIRCUS LINE, DON'T YOU
KNOW —



OH DEAR. I JUST
CAN'T MAKE UP MY MIND
WITH SO MANY WONDERFUL
CHOICES. WHAT'S
GOOD?

EVERYTHING.



I DON'T CARE
IF THE SALMON'S
BETTER. I WANT
THE VEAL.

UP
TO YOU,
SIR.

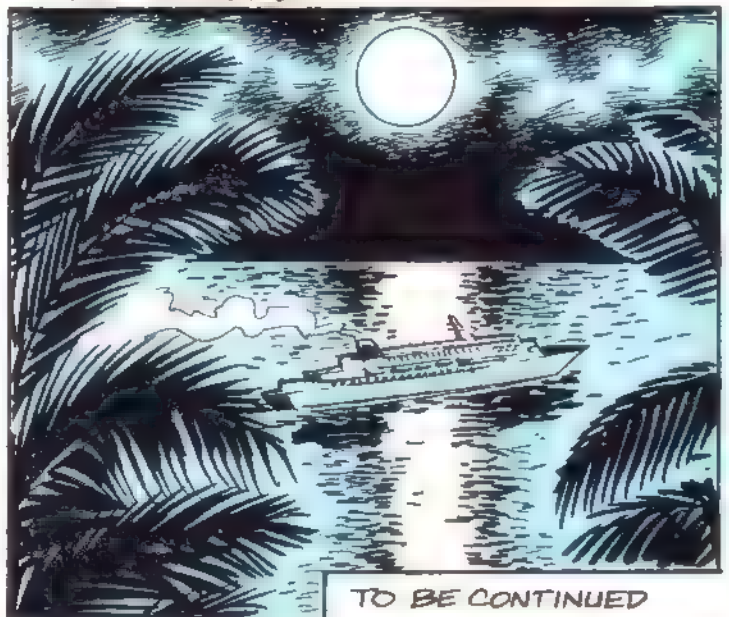


OUR MAN
FRANK IS A
CHARMER.

HE'S EFFICIENT, BUT
HE'S BEEN IN THIS JOB
TOO LONG... THE MAIN
COURSE HE SERVES
EVERY NIGHT IS
CONTEMPT.



AND, SO, WE DINED AS THE SHIP
LEFT THE PORT OF SAN JUAN,
GLIDING INTO A CARIBBEAN NIGHT
AS PEACEFUL AS DEATH...



TO BE CONTINUED



Address all letters of
comment to

SWAK

P O BOX 1007
MUSCATINE, IA
52761

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Hello Max, Terry and Gary!

Just a short note to thank you for donating the entire four page MS. TREE section from the WORD WARRIORS comic to our benefit Comic Art Auction that will be held as always, at the Chicago Comicon at the Ramada O'Hare Hotel on July 3rd. All proceeds from the auction benefit Literacy Volunteers of Chicago—a citywide program that provides free reading instruction to adults who read below the fifth grade level.

The four page story that you donated is a really nice piece of work with two pages of investigation and two pages of gun fight. For MS. TREE fans, it's a unique chance to get an entire MS. TREE story that is short enough to hang on your wall! People who can't make the auction can bid on the whole four pages as a unit by contacting me at Literacy Volunteers of Chicago, 9 W. Washington Rm 460, Chicago, Illinois 60602-312-236-0341.

Thanks as always for your support.

Best
George Hagenauer
Chicago, IL

We hope MS. TREE fans have picked up WORD WARRIORS, which in addition to being a tale in which Ms. Tree appears and plays a major role, is two bucks contributed to a worthy cause. George, incidentally, is the fella who helps me research the Nate Heller (and Elliot Ness) novels, a man without whom doing those books would be damn near impossible.

I'd also like to mention CARIBBEAN BLUES, a current paperback from Paperjacks (the folks who are doing the forthcoming Ms. Tree mass market paperback collections). CARIBBEAN BLUES is another benefit book for the Literacy Volunteers, in this case a mystery novel which was written by myself, Mary Higgins Clark, Gregory McDonald, Warren Murphy, Molly Cochran, Bob Randisi and Ric Meyers, while we were aboard ship on a Caribbean cruise, putting on a mystery thrown by Karen and Billy Palmer (who plotted CARIBBEAN BLUES) of Bogie's Mystery Tours of New York. The novel was written by us simultaneously, each of us going off to our cabins or some other nook or cranny of the ship and writing several chapters, working from an overall outline. It's not a great work of art, but it's fun and, again, for a worthy cause (the authors donated their advance to the Literacy Volunteers). The book takes place in the mid-30s and my three chapters feature Nate Heller (who gets to solve and wrap up the case).

That same Caribbean cruise has provided the inspiration for the serialized graphic novel that begins in this issue, "Murder Cruise," which will run three more issues beyond this one, right up to issue #49, which is the first of our two-part story about the death of Ms. Tree, culminating in our big, special fiftieth issue.

And those of you who have been sending hysterical letters (or, as in the case of Malcom Bourne, making concerned transcontinental phone calls to me) about the future of Ms. Tree, let me say only the following: in the words of Richard Nixon, Indiana Jones and the Used Car Dealers of America—trust me.

Dear Max and Terry

Unfortunately, the focus of SWAK lately has been on the twelve-page - \$2.00 controversy, and not on the MS. TREE stories themselves. MS. TREE is currently in its best period ever, and "Like Father" the best story since the abortion clinic two-parter. The mystery and action were carefully developed, making me really want to know who killed Michael's father. The three month wait between issues only heightened the suspense (though please don't make this a habit). Most importantly, yet another potential regular supporting character (Michael's sister) became entangled in the web of violence that surrounds Ms. Tree. I wonder if in the future, she will take measures to protect those around her a little more.

As for the Johnny Dynamite controversy, I'm still undecided on the overall quality of the stories. However, I'll continue to buy MS. TREE as long as you two keep doing it. Quite simply, I feel a sense of loyalty to you two and the book, and I

like the art and story. All the MS. TREE readers I know personally feel the same way, and plan to support your "labor of love." The black and white glut is over, and if MS. TREE comes out on a regular schedule, it will surpass its old sales levels.

Max, I've read the four Quarry's, the four Nolan's and "No Cure for Death." I liked all of the above except the first two Nolan's. How many Mallory books have you written, and are they available?

Athos Bousvares
Durham, NC

Thanks for your good words and loyalty. Unfortunately, those who have complained about the reduced amount of "Ms. Tree" herself per issue may be right on one account: it might be difficult to attract new readers with this format, even with the success of the DC WILD DOG feature by Terry and me. And we're doing our best to stay on a regular schedule,

but it does get a bit frantic around here.

As far as Mallory is concerned, there are five of the books so far (another is planned, but several years away from publication, at least). They are: NO CURE FOR DEATH, THE BABY-BLUE RIP-OFF, KILL YOUR DARLINGS, A SHROUD FOR AQUARIUS, and NICE WEEKEND FOR A MURDER. All of them are (or will be shortly) available in paperback from TOR.

To SWAK:

I've been reading—in silence—the raging debate over your "abridged" format. No longer. I feel it's time that someone put all of this in perspective, so I elected myself to do so. It seems that many of your readers have objected strenuously to being "ripped off" as they call it. After all, to pay two bucks for a measly 14 pages of new art? Well, if we take a looksee over at the industry leader, Marvel Comics, we find that they have set a precedent of sorts with their CLASSIC X-MEN.

Here we have a book that serves up 15 pages of new art for \$1.00. Now, this may seem like a (comparative) bargain; 14 pages of MS. TREE for \$2.00 vs. 15 pages of THE X-MEN for \$1.00, but not when you stop to check that the regular X-MEN title gives you an additional six pages for that same buck. Further, with MS. TREE not only do you get not one, not two, not three, but four to five pages of thought provoking, intelligent letters, while CLASSIC X-MEN sadly has none (not even the fanboy, "Gosh your great!" missives).

Also, consider this, CLASSIC X-MEN features 17 pages of reprint material that most of us have already seen, while MS. TREE reprints only eight pages of material long out of print. (Remember, something is only a reprint if you've seen it in print previously. If, when it's reprinted it is your first viewing, then it's as good as brand new. Right?)

Thus you have it, 14 pages of new art, 4-5 pages of letters (with serious answers, yet!), and only 8 pages of "reprint" material for \$2.00 vs. 15 pages of new art, no letters page(s) and a whopping 17 pages of old material for the same dollar that we're expected to pay for 22 pages of "current" X-MEN stories(and one page of "Gosh your great!" letters).

Now don't get me wrong, 1) I do still enjoy the material in the CLASSIC X-MEN (both new and old): 2) I'm not a big fan of Johnny Dynamite material in MS. TREE. However, I would rather see 14 pages of MS. TREE 12 times a year than not at all (assuming that's the choice). Come on people, there are so few quality books out there I, for one, am willing to accept some sacrifices to see that they continue publishing.

Personally, I'm hoping that by the time the Johnny Dynamite stories have run their course that the circulation of MS. TREE will have improved enough that Max and Terry will see their way clear to returning to full length stores. Still again, if they decide to insert something else in those pages, I'll continue to buy the book, as it is still one of the most enjoyable books on the market.

Robert J. Sodero
Fairfield, CT

Thanks for your amusing defense of our format, Robert. MS. TREE fans should seek out AGENT UNKNOWN, which Robert Sodero writes, which is also published by Renegade Press.

Dear Max and Terry,

You really covered your bets with the cover for issue #42 of MS. TREE. If the issue came out in Mid-January it had the perfect look of a Valentine's Day special.

The "Coming of Rage" plotline is going smooth. The use of Terry and Gary using photographs of real scenes is starting to look very good. Ms. Tree really appeared to be part of the scene on the splash page. And the technique worked again on page 3.

Since "The Coming of Rage" series ends with issue #44, and the following four issues will deal quite a bit with Ms. Tree's circle of friends, that puts things very close to the 50th issue. Should I take a wild guess that the plot is about Dominique Muerta taking over Renegade Press and forcing Ms. Tree to make Mike Tree Jr. a teenage mutant? (I said it was wild, not real.)

So until Ms. Tree meets the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, I remain sincerely yours,

Hurricane Heeran
Van Nuys, CA

As you've guessed, we're planning something special for the 50th issue. In addition to the conclusion of the two-part death of Ms. Tree story, we'll have a flexi-disc with my band Cruisin' performing the instrumental "Theme from Ms. Tree," which I've written with my musical partner Paul Thomas. Also, we're inviting pros (and fans, for that matter) to submit their interpretations of Ms. Tree for a portfolio of guest artists.

Dear Max and everybody else,

You guys are really starting to pick up speed. "Collision Course" was a nifty piece of narrative suspense construction. And Terry, that work in the Crossroad Cafe scene was very nice.

I have to admit I liked "Cold Cash" because I was able to figure THIS "Minute Mist-ery" out! And "Murder Hit Home" had a nice, densely packed, fever pitch to it.

Kevin Miller
Elmhurst, IL

Thanks Kevin. I thought "Collision Course" was pretty nifty myself, and shows that the team is getting the hang of this revised, shorter chapter length.

Dear Max Collins:

It was about eighteen months ago that I discovered MS. TREE and I thought it was time to express my opinion. I thought issue #42 was a well done issue. Yes, I know it was full of cliches (Mike falling for his step-mother's worst enemies' daughter, the girl not realizing who her mother "really" is and so on), but even so it was very well handled. This was an example where the cliches really worked to form a good story.

The Johnny Dynamite stories are indeed improving. I was disappointed at having less Ms. Tree each issue but I understand the economics of the decision. In the same vein, as a college student it is economically impossible to see Wild Dog's future appearances. Yes, I did like the mini-series but I cannot

afford \$1.50 per week for one or two stories I might be interested in.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank you for my inspiration. Last summer I discovered your books and especially enjoyed the Nathan Heller books. I also read the Eliot Ness book and was intrigued by the man, Eliot Ness, and wondered what he was like. History is one of my two majors (Computer Science is the other one) and as such I had to write a senior seminar. I took advantage of my curiosity and researched Eliot Ness. I found a fascinating man and managed to earn an A- for my work (from the hardest grader in the department no less). I just wanted to thank you for introducing me to such fascinating characters as Ms. Tree and Eliot Ness.

Phil Brown
New Concord, OH

Your comments about "Coming of Rage" are appreciated, though I wouldn't characterize reworking "Romeo and Juliet" as a cliché exactly, especially since our ending is rather more upbeat.

The somewhat negative fan response to the notion of ACTION WEEKLY has mystified me; why not wait until you've read a couple of issues, to decide whether or not there are enough features that you like to justify picking it up weekly? I can't promise anyone that ACTION WEEKLY will be a wonderful comic book; I haven't seen it yet (other than the WILD DOG material I'm working on, of course). But why do so many fans assume it'll be a bad book, without ever having read a copy? This all reeks of the MS. TREE format controversy, if you ask me, but even less justified, as people didn't bitch about our format till they'd at least seen it once or twice. (The bitching has let up for the most part, incidentally—a combination, I would suppose, of certain of the disgruntled readers taking a hike, and the better, earlier "Johnny Dynamite" stories that we're into at this point.)

What you had to say about Eliot Ness hit home with me; the more I research the man, the more interesting and enigmatic he becomes. The second Ness novel, BUTCHER'S DOZEN will be out from Bantam late this year; and I am now working on the third, BULLET PROOF, which will be out next year.

Dear Max and Terry,

Perhaps the best news in #41 was that the sales of this publication are slowly increasing after their abrupt drop-off. (And, of course, I mean that it's good they're increasing at all, not that they're increasing slowly! Sheesh!) I don't know if such a trend is general amongst the better black and white titles, but at least it holds our hope that MS. TREE can survive and even prosper.

Another piece of good news was the deal with Paperjacks for doing reprints of MS. TREE. Again, this means that producing this comic book should be more of a viable operation. It is interesting and heartening also that these reprints will be part of a line of "mystery novels" not merely of comic book reprints. While there's nothing wrong with a series of comic book reprints, being included with others in the same genre is perhaps an indication that some of the prejudices the general public holds against comics are beginning to fall.

I've never heard of the "Legion of Decency" before and from your brief comments in the lettercol, I should count myself lucky on that score! But if they are typical of the kind of group they appear to be (from what I gather from your words—and their name), an essential part of their wardrobe

is no doubt the Cloak of American Patriotism. It always amuses and amazes (and frightens and disturbs) me how often such groups seem completely oblivious of the fact that freedom of expression is so central to the essence of Americanism. Being a Confused Canuck, I have been known to disagree with certain elements of The American Way, but these groups seem to want to have it both ways—appeal to patriotism but slap down (or, worse, totally ignore) fundamental parts of what the patriotism actually means! Then again, whadda I know?!

Getting on to the story (yes, the story!) in #41, it was, I feel, the strongest one yet in the brief history of the new format. Perhaps because there was no hard-hitting action, there was room for us to delve into the characters themselves. I see a certain maturity in Ms. Tree's outlook now. After having swung from one extreme to the other (and back again), she finally seems to be getting some sort of handle on how she wants to lead her life—and how she can lead her life. Time will tell if events will conspire against such moderation—and from the title of this multi-parter ("The Coming of Rage"), I have this sneaking suspicion that they just might! It's also good to see some focus on Mike Jr.—and a reminder that sometimes "simple" everyday things like going to school can seem to be (and in fact are, in a sense) earth-shattering.

As for your question about seeing a Ms. Tree story in "just" black and white, I wouldn't mind it as an experiment but I feel that the duotone is a distinctive feature of this comic book that should not be lost—and besides, I've kind of grown accustomed to it!

Johnny Dynamite continues to improve its status in my eyes. Though it will never truly replace an equal number of pages of Ms. Tree, this is coming to mean to me not that I value JD so lowly but that I value Ms. Tree so highly. In other words, it's good (especially for a reprint series) but it's not as good as our beloved Ms. Tree! (Still we take what we can get, eh?)

Finally, I should mention that the Mike Mist mysteries might have to be beefed up a bit. Yes, that telltale sign of deterioration appeared—I got this issue's mystery right! Or maybe it's that telltale sign of dumb luck...

T.M. Maple,
Weston, Ontario

I goofed: It's not the "Legion of Decency," it's the "Federation of Decency." But your reactions to any such group are right on the money, T.M.

Dear Max and Terry;

Wisps of wind blew whispers of danger into my ear. Elongated shadows stretched up and down the street I live on. At my side near my typewriter is the latest issue of Ms. Tree. It as though she has smiled at me. I wait breathless. I wait anxiously for the next installment. I look to the corner of my room, there my long dark black rain coat hangs still. Little droplets of rain roll down off it. It has been good. I have just finished reading Ms. Tree #41. It is good "noir" magazine.

It has been some time since I have written to your magazine. I have recovering from the wound that Ms. Tree fired upon me back in issue #7. She caught me off guard as I read through the letters section. All is forgiven. I have been reading her still even as I serve time at San Francisco State University. Broadcasting guards (teachers) occasionally allow a certain amount of time to visit local book stores. Fortunately I

have been able to find all of your Nate Heller novels; THE DARK CITY and QUARRY'S CUT. I hope during the winter break to start reading the HELLER TRILOGY. I started reading the first one and then got bogged in school work. It was quite good. One question: Why did you or Tor books decide to drop the photographs and the maps that appeared in the hard bound editions of TRUE CRIME and THE MILLION DOLLAR WOUND? Looking through the hard bound copies, I found that they helped capture the era.

MS. TREE still capture's the feel of mystery. I almost ceased reading her adventures when my friends at Comics and Comix told me that you had planned to cut her stories in half and begin to reprint old Johnny Dynamite stories. I thought "Less of Ms. Tree and another back up to read." I decided to read all of the back issues that lay at my side. The Ms. Tree stories held up quite well. I avoided the Johnny Dynamite stories. Then I read the one in issue #41. It was excellent. It is interesting to see how both Ms. Tree and Johnny Dynamite are similar, though almost thirty years separate them.

Looking back, it is almost forty years since the excellent film noir "The Big Clock" came out. Now we have the remake entitled "No Way Out." It is just as taut and it too keeps you revited. Other examples are the excellent but flawed "The Untouchables." Maybe that is why these films and your stories seem so timeless, because we still have not learned from our past. Film Noir, like Ms. Tree, demonstrates to us all that we all are running from the skeletons in our hidden closets.

I also would like to state here that I do agree with Hurricane Heeran; it is time to drop the half tones. As I had stated in this letter and in issue #7, Ms. Tree is rooted in the film noir school. Besides Black and White always demonstrated the polarity of good and evil in an aesthetic sense. Where Ms. Tree could easily fit into the late 40's and 50's; Max you have placed her in the oppressed 80's. Once again have we really learned anything from the past?

I plan to remain faithful to MS. TREE even as she enters the new era of controversy. It is because of Max and his excellent ability to weave stories that concern our own era. Ms. Tree stories have for the majority of the time stood head and shoulders above "Miami Vice." I'm also glad to see that she is no Rambo. I like characters that can think and also get hurt. Bravo to Ms. Tree. Bravo to Max Collins and Terry Beatty.

Well I hear the guards screaming from the corner of my mind. They want to start breaking the pile of books over in the corner. So little time to have and not enough time to do it all. I am glad I read the latest issue. I am glad that I took time to send and write you this letter. Keep up with the good work. Okay I'm coming. RRRRUUMBLEE CRRACK!!!

The door closed till next month when Ms. Tree comes and visits me. Hopefully with her friend Johnny Dynamite.

John Mudien
San Francisco, CA.

Welcome home, John; usually when Ms. Tree shoots somebody, they stay shot. Heller is not a trilogy, by the way - the fourth one, NEON MIRAGE, is out right now. As for TOR omitting the pics, they tell me it's because of the poor reproductive quality they get on the pulpy paperback paper. I don't mind...it provides an incentive for readers to spring for the more expensive hardcover. NEON MIRAGE, by the way, is probably physically the most handsome Heller volume to date.

Dear Max,

I'm sure I don't know what the heck everyone's complaining about; the letter column of Ms. Tree alone was worth two bucks. As a matter of fact, I felt so guilty about getting the whole package so cheap that I felt compelled to enclose two bucks to ease my conscience. Maybe you can take Terry out for a burger.

Lou Bear
Davis, CA

Lou isn't kidding: he really did send us two bucks; and we (Collins and Beatty) really did split it, and spend it, each in his own way. Sorry, Gary!

Dear Max and Terry

Regarding the idea of doing MS. TREE in black and white, issue #41 makes a good example of trying the idea. Having had the good fortune of meeting Terry at the San Diego Comics Convention and seeing some photocopies of this issue's art in straight B&W, I think that little was gained by adding the green half-tones.

As for Terry's other experiment of adding real buildings into the background, it's looking better all the time. The background graffiti in the restaurant ("Archie-N-Ronnie" "Miss Lace Lives") was almost too interesting. I found myself reading it more than the balloons.

Not too much violence was written into "Coming of Rage," Max. The only gunplay was in two brief flashbacks (which only showed a gun being fired) and the only knifing was also a flashback(although this time a victim was shown). Even the meeting between Mike and Lisa was nice and quiet. If it wasn't for the Johnny Dynamite story, this issue might have gotten a CCA seal. Keep this trend up and MS. TREE could be published by HARVEY or STAR COMICS.

My opinion of the Johnny Dynamite reprints is improving with each issue. Now it's clear that the first two weren't even close to being from the A stack or the B stack. Regrettably, it takes the place of a Ms. Tree story, but at least it's not the poor substitute that it appeared to be at first.

I'm glad that there was an explanation for Johnny getting the eyepatch in "Eye For An Eye." Even better, that the story had Johnny in the hospital for eight weeks instead of an overnight stay. Probably die to Johnny being a pre-Silver age comic, I felt that those two details would have been forgotten, and just one day he would have had an eye-patch.

Before closing, congratulations to you two on the deal with Paperjacks books to reprint Ms. Tree stories. Hopefully that will help things out. Also congratulations on DC picking up on WILD DOG , even though that puts a crimp on Ms. Tree going fulltime.

So until Ms. Tree meets Veronica Lodge or Mike Mist asks Archie Andrews for help with girlfriends, I remain sincerely yours,

Hurricane Heeran
Van Nuys, CA

All kidding aside, one of the nice things about having the consistently violent "Johnny Dynamite" as a back-up story is that I don't have to worry about whether or not I'm meeting any sort of action quota in MS. TREE...I can tell the story as it needs to be told.

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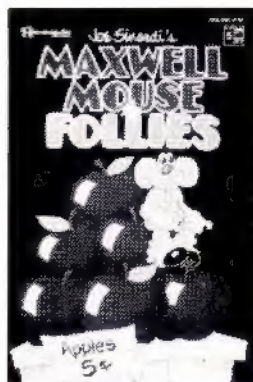
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